

POLS 329 A
Comparative African Politics

Classes 2 and 3:
Precolonial Africa

Welcome back!

Also: download Kahoot!

Reminders

- Download Kahoot!
- Sign up for presentations:
 - <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1rvItEmxJLgRn2vA3bNAbVhw7dQE-bcD6PnxIr6ttKCw/edit?usp=sharing>
- No class on January 21

Recap



Why study Africa

Economic, geopolitical importance

Interesting → empirical puzzles

Analytical opportunities



Challenges

Practical and analytical

Ethical

Plan for today



Precolonial history of Africa



Contemporary impacts of
historical processes

Comparative politics of precolonial Africa

- Focus on two variables:
 - Centralization
 - Distribution of power

Political systems in precolonial Africa



Non-state polities

Low-cost governance structures:

- Common descent (lineage, clan)
- Place of residence
- Moiety
- Age ranking (age-set, generation-set)

Acephalous, polycephalous, and monocephalous



States



Continuum of forms

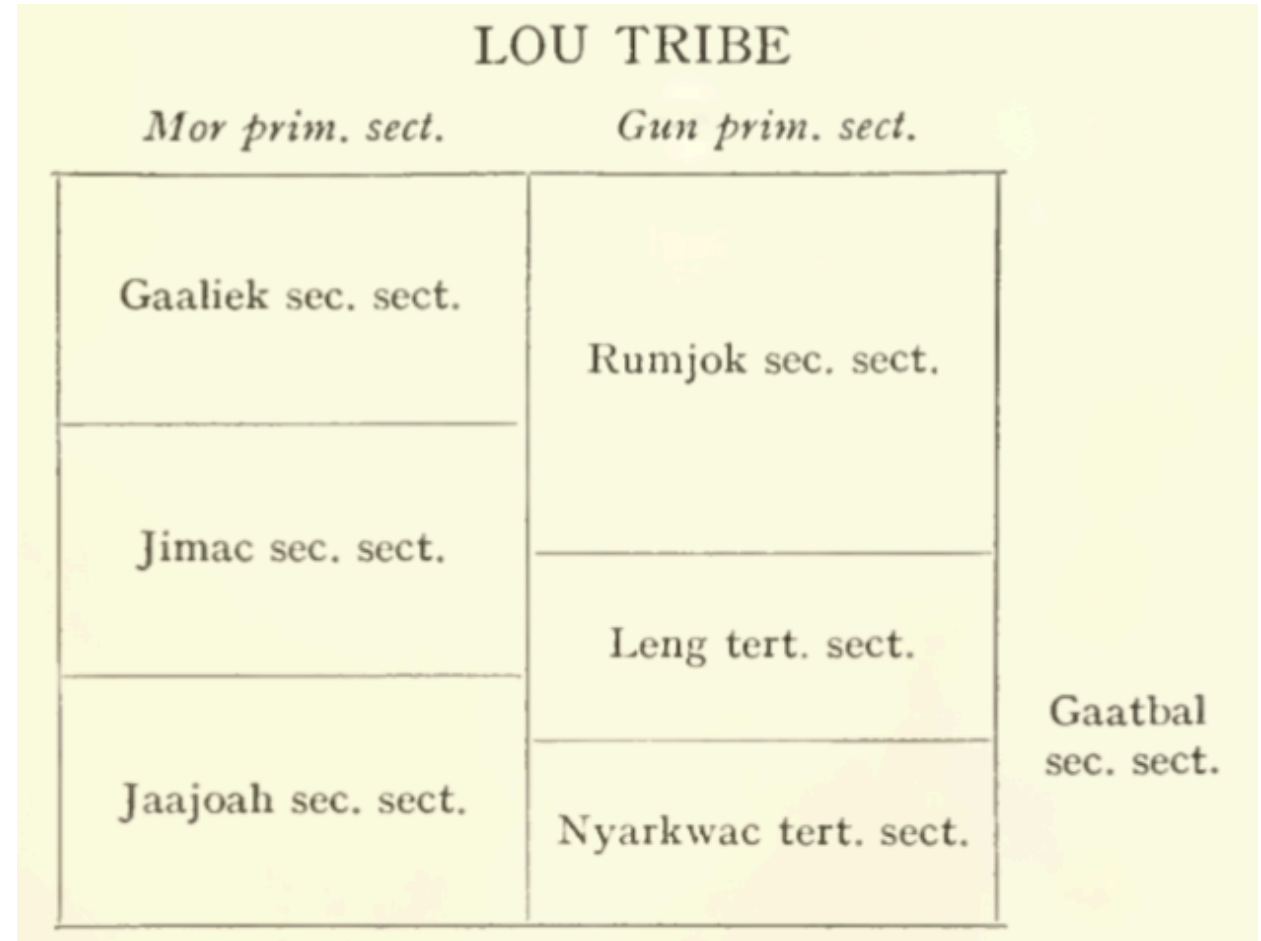
Degrees of political centralization

How have the Nuer historically governed their society (according to Evans-Pritchard)?



Non-state polities: Nuer

- Nuer tribes and primary, secondary, and tertiary tribal sections
- Age-set system and gender relations
- Leopard-skin chiefs and elders
- Acephalous governance system

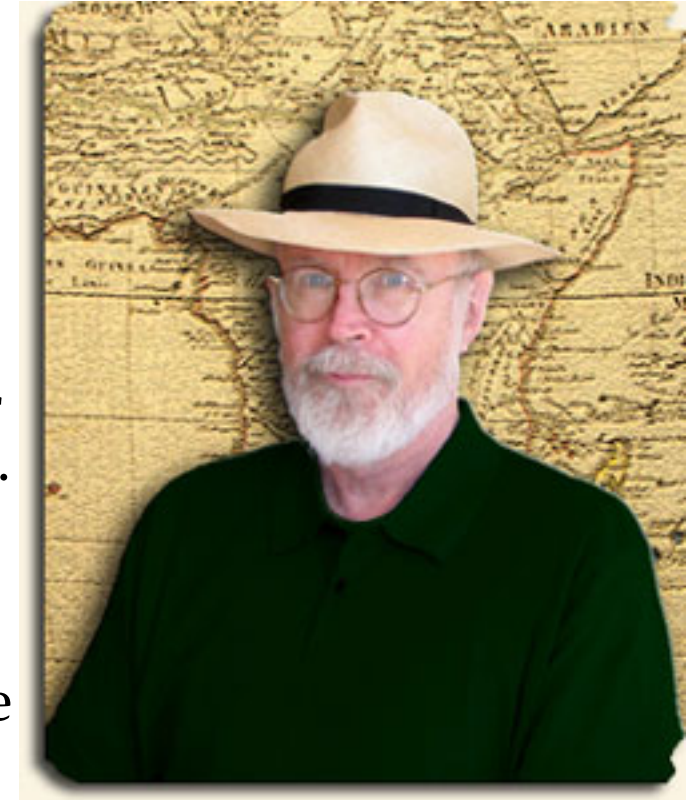


What are the benefits and drawbacks of the Nuer political organization?

Non-state polities: Nuer

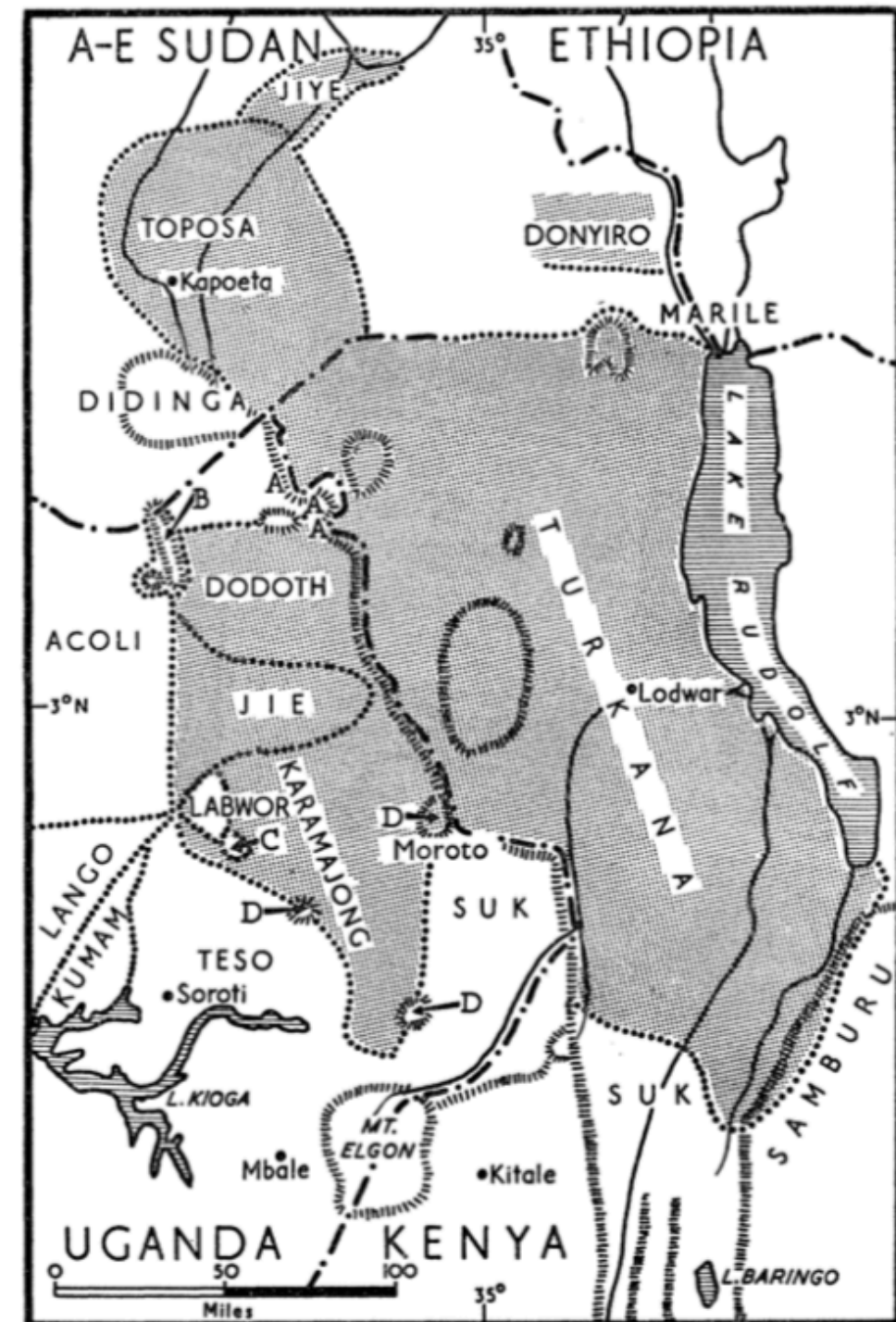
- Effects of statelessness according to Robert Bates:
 - “Societies that rely upon households to enforce property rights are societies in which peace is secured by the fear of retaliation. As Evans-Pritchard’s account makes clear, such a system *can* work; after all, by his account, the Nuer did live peacefully, in spite of the temptation of theft. But what Evans-Pritchard fails to make clear are the high costs of this political system — costs that include the poverty of Nuer society.”
 - “The political institutions of kinship societies impose a cruel trade-off: peace on the one hand and prosperity on the other.”

- Robert Bates. 2010. *Prosperity and Violence: The Political Economy of Development*, 2nd Ed. New York: W. W. Norton.



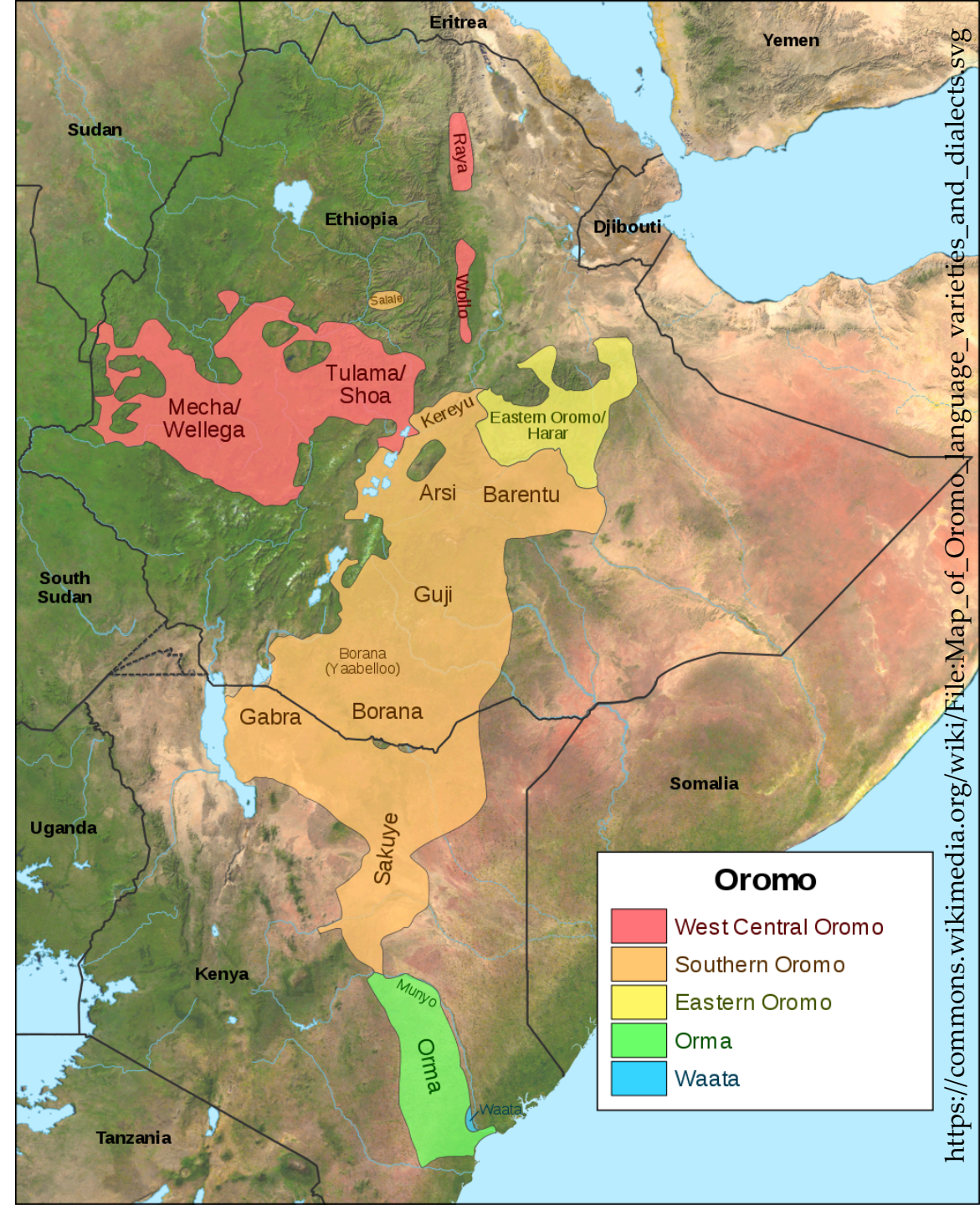
Non-state polities: Ateker

- Multiple distinct ethnic groups and historically fluid ethnic identities
- Generation-sets and age-sets
- Quasi-acephalous, gerontocratic political system



Non-state polities: Borana

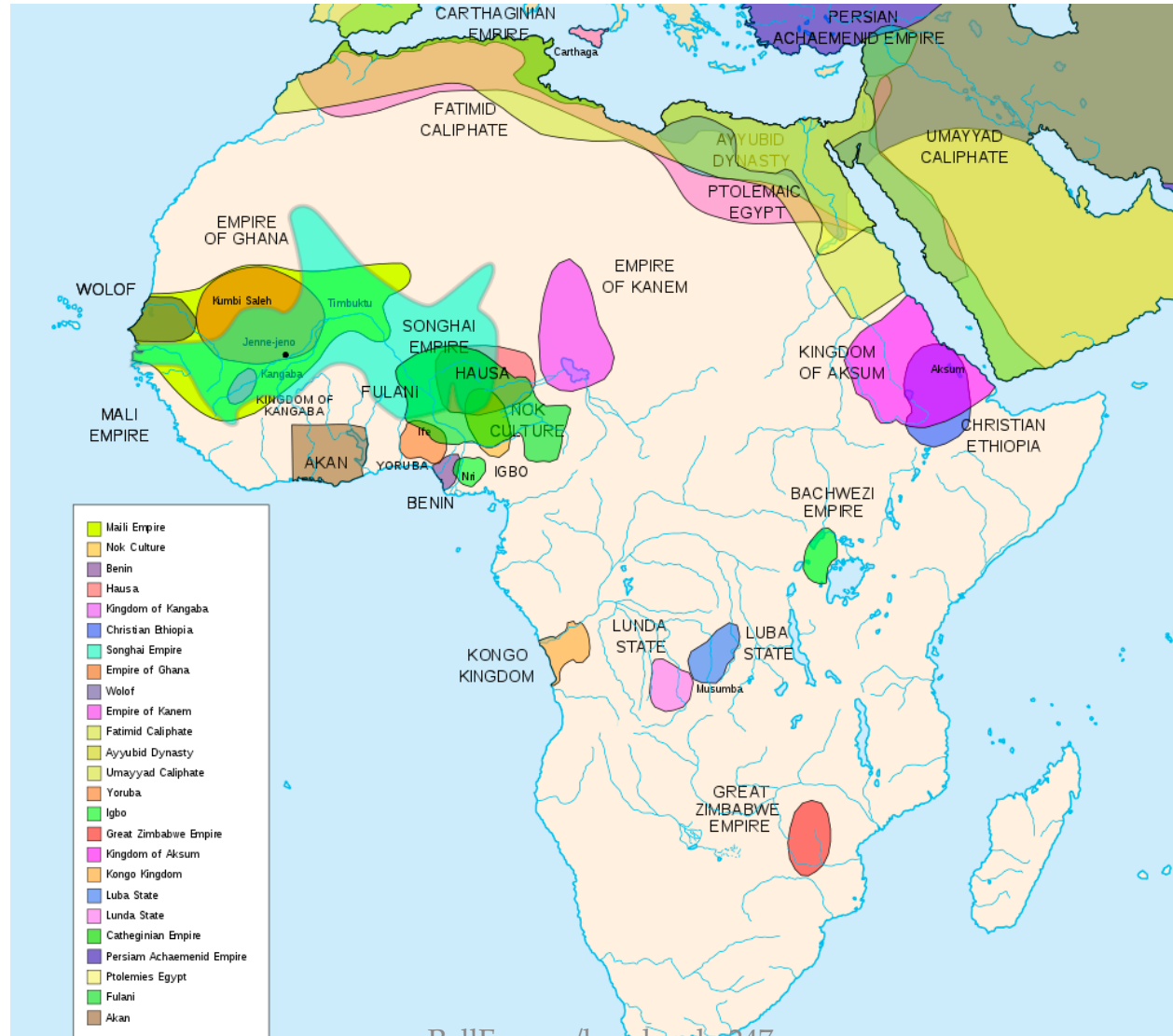
- Complex polycephalous polity
- Four pillars:
 - *Gadaa* generation-class system (with elected *gadaa* officials)
 - Hereditary high priests
 - Segmentation into moieties, clans, sub-clans, and lineages (with their own leaders)
 - Hierarchy of assemblies and councils



Monocephalous polities

- Chiefdoms
- Statelets
- States

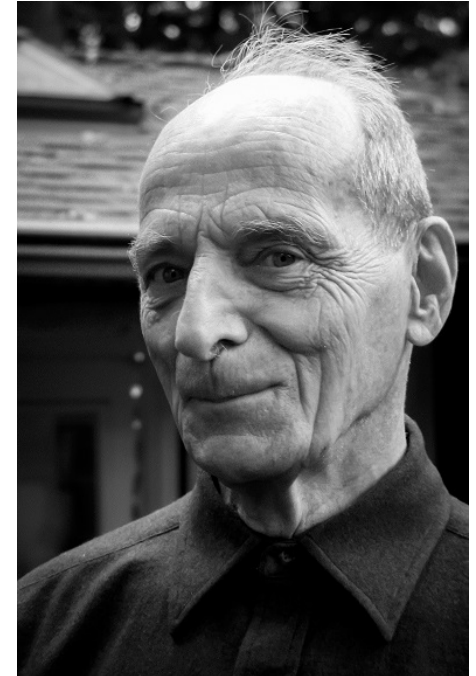
States



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States

- A typology of precolonial African states (by Jan Vansina):
 - Federations
 - Aristocratic kingdoms
 - Incorporative kingdoms
 - Regal kingdoms
 - Despotic kingdoms
 - Vansina, Jan. 1962. "A Comparison of African Kingdoms." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 32 (4): 324–335.



States: Ashanti Empire

- Federation:
 - Council of elders
 - King as the *primus inter pares*



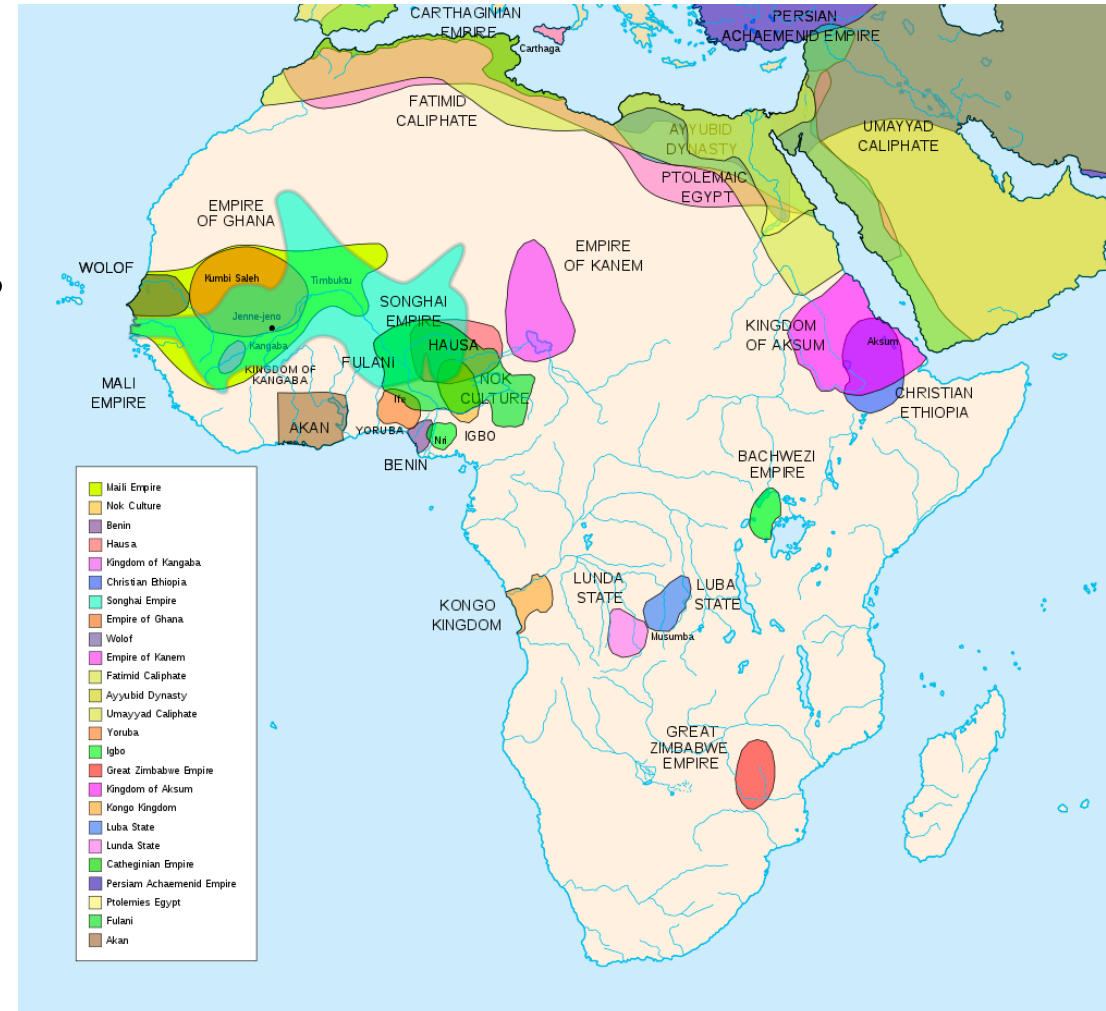
States: Kongo Kingdom

- 'Aristocratic kingdom'
- Projection of central state power limited to collection of tribute
- Territorial administration by chiefs / local notables



States: Luba and Lunda

- ‘Incorporative kingdoms’
- Double system of administration:
 - Hereditary, pre-state formation chiefs
 - Central-state ‘overseers’



States: Burundi

- 'Regal kingdom'
- Kinship relations between the king and chiefs
- Transfer of provincial control at the time of royal accession



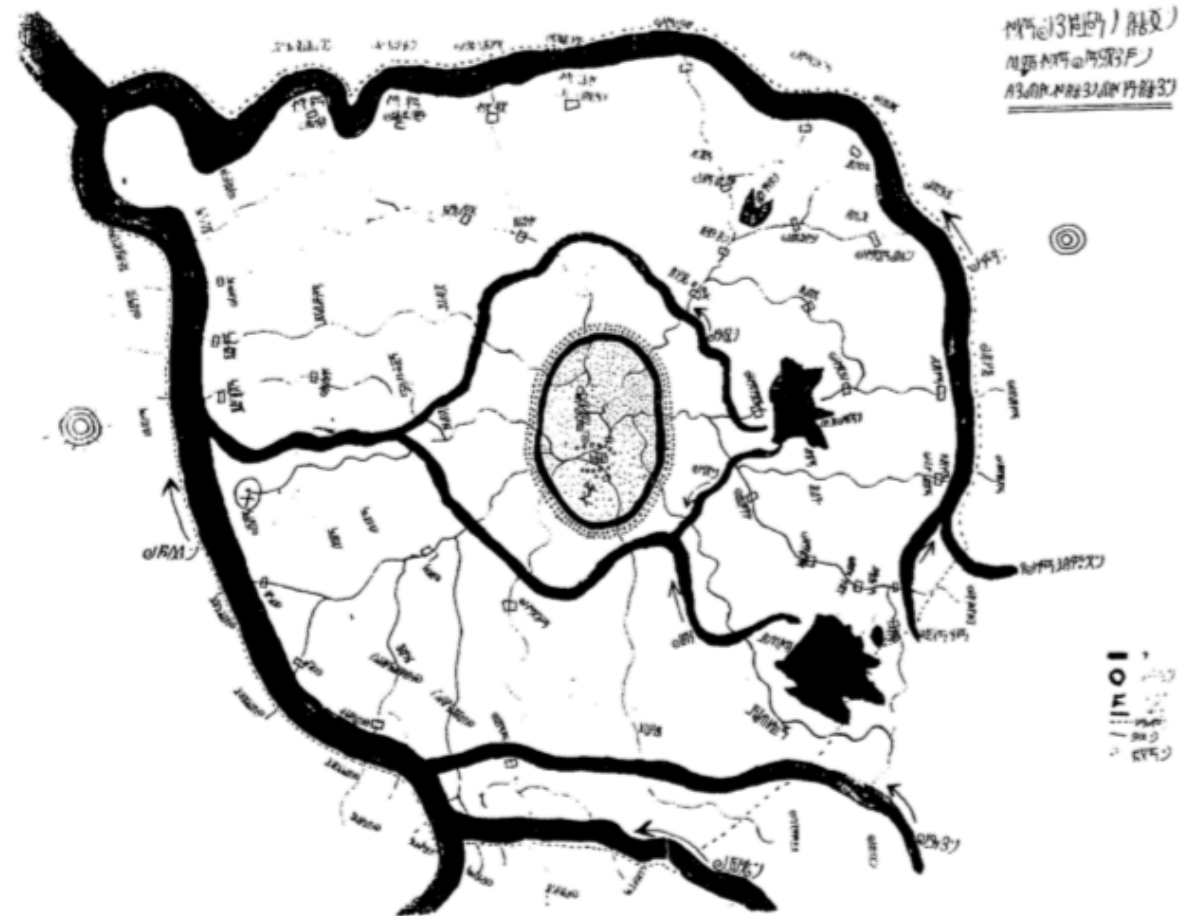
Comparative politics of precolonial Africa

- Which of the polities are most decentralized and centralized?
- Which of them have the most and least concentrated distribution of political power?

What explains the variation in precolonial political systems in Africa (according to Herbst)?

Political power in precolonial Africa according to Herbst

- Power “as a series of concentric circles radiating out from the core.”



Political power in precolonial Africa according to Herbst

- “[S]tates rose and fell, expanded and contracted, largely in relation to the amount of coercion they were able to broadcast from the center.”

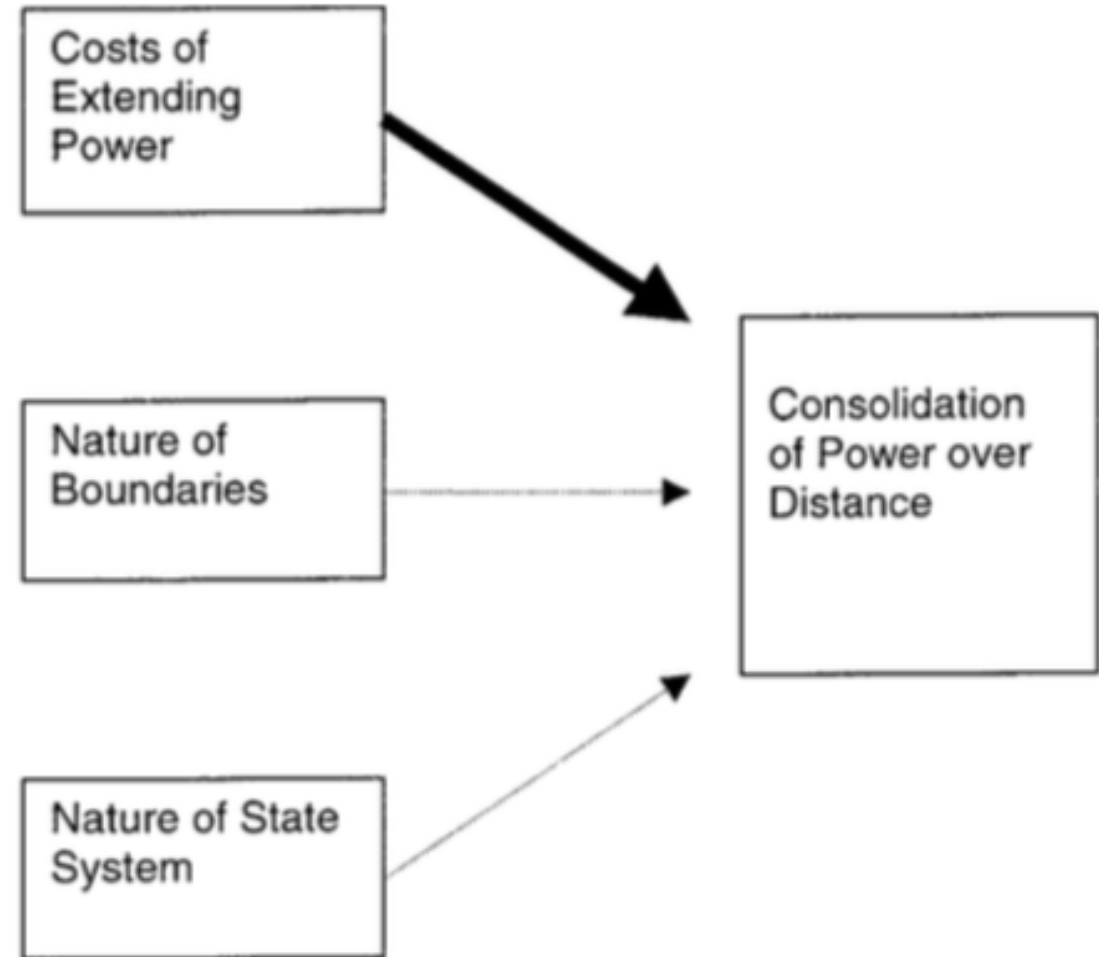


Figure 2.1. Paths to State Consolidation in Precolonial Africa

Kahoot!

Contemporary impacts of precolonial centralization

- Large literature showing robust positive association between precolonial centralization and contemporary provision of:
 - Public goods / services:
 - E.g. Michalopoulos, S., and E. Papaioannou. 2014. "On the Ethnic Origins of African Development: Chiefs and Precolonial Political Centralization." *Academy of Management Perspectives* 29 (1): 32–71.
 - Private goods:
 - E.g. Bandyopadhyay, Sanghamitra, and Elliott Green. 2016. "Pre-Colonial Political Centralization and Contemporary Development in Uganda." *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 64 (3): 471–508.

Contemporary impacts of precolonial centralization



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https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Protectorate-of-Uganda-around-1900-with-Western-kingdoms-and-locations-of-sampled_fig1_272532758

What explains the
contemporary impacts of
precolonial centralization?

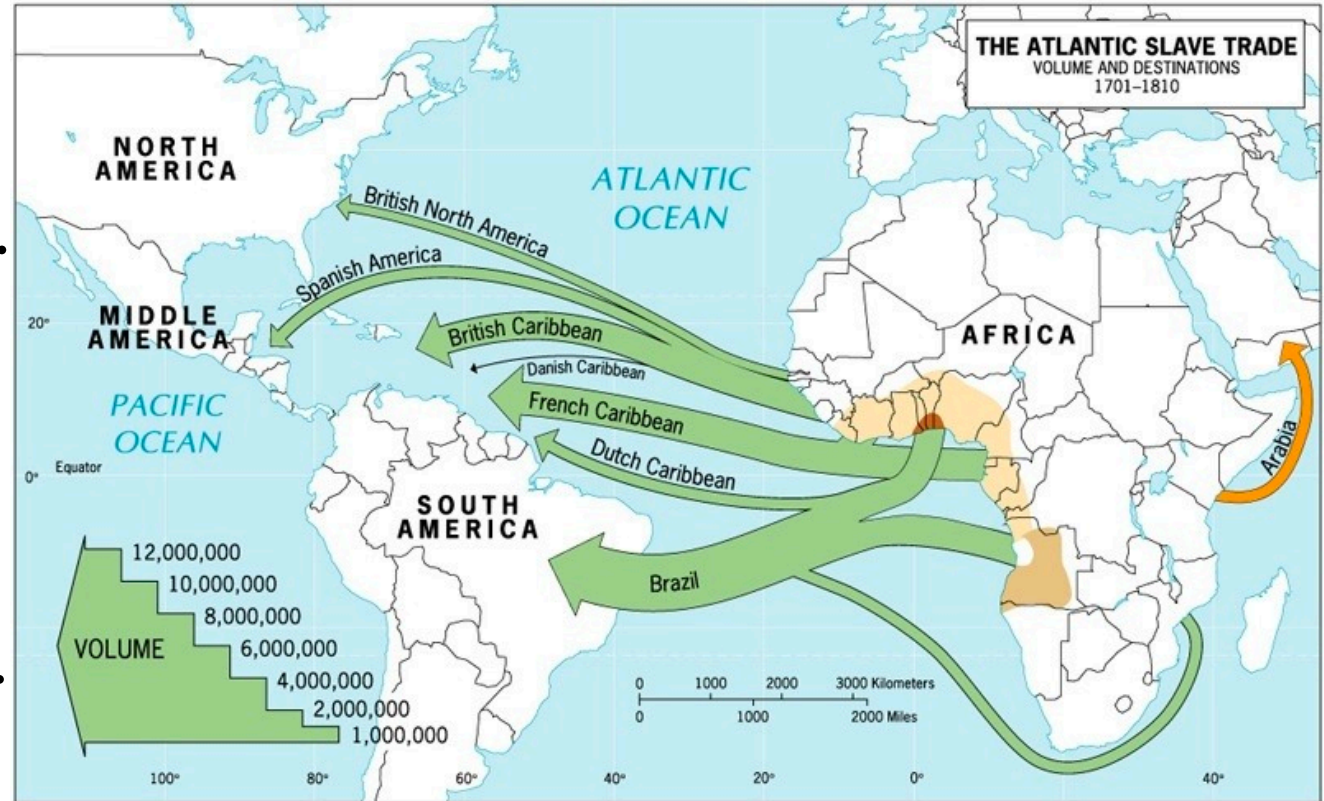
Contemporary impacts of precolonial centralization: mechanisms

- Development persistence: centralization = development
- Local legitimacy and accountability
- Centralization = strong identities → facilitation of cooperation
- Centralization → strong leaders capable of negotiating with national governments
 - But: what is those strong leaders do not comply with national demands?

- Archibong, Belinda. 2019. "Explaining Divergence in the Long-Term Effects of Precolonial Centralization on Access to Public Infrastructure Services in Nigeria." *World Development* 121: 123–40.

Slave trade

- Intra-African slave trade
- Arab slave trade:
~14 million people, 7th-19th c.
- Atlantic slave trade:
~8-20 million (12.8 million according to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database) people, 16th-19th c.



What have been the impacts
of slave trade?

Impacts of slave trade

- In Africa:
 - Population reduction
 - Insecurity
 - Institutional disruption
 - Reorientation (and potentially stagnation) of local economies
- Elsewhere:
 - Industrial Revolution
 - Trajectories of economic and political development in the Americas
 - Racism



Contemporary impacts of slave trade

- “If the slave trades had not occurred, then 72% of the average income gap between Africa and the rest of the world would not exist today, and 99% of the income gap between Africa and other developing countries would not exist.”
 - Nunn, Nathan. 2008. “The Long-Term Effects of Africa’s Slave Trades.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123: 139-176.
- Strong negative relationship between the intensity of the slave trade among one’s ethnic ancestors and an individual’s trust in others today
 - Nunn, Nathan, and Leonard Wantchekon. 2011. “The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa.” *American Economic Review* 101 (7): 3221–52.

What are the mechanisms?

Contemporary impacts of slave trade

- Nathan Nunn and Leonard Wantchekon:
 - Strong negative relationship between the intensity of the slave trade among one's ethnic ancestors and an individual's trust in others today
 - Nunn, Nathan, and Leonard Wantchekon. 2011. "The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa." *American Economic Review* 101 (7): 3221–52.

Recap

Comparative politics of precolonial Africa

- Centralization
- Distribution of power

Non-state polities

States

Origins of precolonial political systems

Contemporary impacts of precolonial centralization

Slave trade and its impacts